

THE UNITED STATES ARMY
FACES OF
STRENGTHtm

The Nation's strength starts here.

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STRENGTH**

This is a collection of stories about the everyday heroes of the Army Family, who have answered our Nation's call with selfless service and unflinching strength. They are sons and daughters, spouses and parents, neighbors and friends. They are ordinary people who do extraordinary things.

The Nation's strength starts here.



SSG Michael Espejo, Jr.

Staff Sergeant Michael Espejo, Jr. was aiding an injured man in an Afghan policeman's uniform, when he was called upon to deflect an attack. The injured man had wired himself with a bomb and was attempting to detonate it. SSG Espejo instructed the suicide bomber to surrender in both English and Pashto. When the bomber ignored the order and tried to activate the explosives, SSG Espejo shot him. His sharp thinking and precise firing saved the lives of four other Soldiers, several Afghan policemen and two Department of State employees.

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Ms. Donna Cranston

Everyday, Donna Cranston leaves for the Dallas / Fort Worth Airport to greet troops returning home. Cranston is the coordinator of “Welcome Home a Hero,” a job she approaches with tireless energy as she and her crew of hundreds of Civilian and Veteran volunteers greet troops with cheers and hugs. But her noble role doesn’t stop there. After greeting these Soldiers, Cranston is known to help them find their Families, make connecting flights, or offer a meal or her phone to call a loved one, earning her the treasured nickname, “Mother of all Soldiers.”

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SPC Monica Brown

Specialist Monica Brown joined the Army when she was 17, because her brother had joined and she didn't want him to be alone. Match that kind of compassion with professional medical training and you begin to understand why she put herself in the direct line of fire to provide life-saving medical attention to fellow Soldiers wounded by an improvised explosive device. It might also explain why she was awarded one of our Nation's highest honors, the Silver Star.

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Dominick Smith

When 11-year-old Dominick Smith grows up, he wants to be a NASA engineer, or a pro basketball player, or a Soldier. This son of Soldiers lives as boldly as he dreams. Culturally adaptable and trilingual, Dominick is a model student. Highest among his commendations is the President's Award, which honors academic excellence and exemplary citizenship. His parents, Sergeant First Class Katina Smith and Master Sergeant Eddie B. Smith, Jr., are very proud of him and would be pleased if he decided to one day join the Army. His strength of mind, spirit and character attest to the values Army life has taught him.

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MAJ Masaki Nakazono

He could have been ministering to a Parish back home, but then-Captain (Chaplain) Masaki Nakazono chose to serve in the Army - and found himself stationed in the Iraqi city of Heit. He laid his life on the line daily, traveling unsecured roads without a weapon to visit Soldiers at forward posts and meeting with local religious leaders to break down cultural barriers. Platoon Sergeant Phillip Dentis discovered the value of CPT Nakazono's spiritual guidance when his roommate was killed in action. "If he had not been there, I just would have gone to shambles," Dentis says. "You can see that he cares." MAJ Nakazono lives the Warrior Ethos and knows that the bond between Soldiers goes beyond risks and hazards.

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Mr. Tom McGinnis

Like others whose sons and daughters have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, Tom McGinnis channels his loss into compassion and service. In 2006, Tom's son, Private First Class Ross A. McGinnis, gave his life to protect fellow Soldiers, throwing himself on a grenade that was tossed into his platoon's Humvee in Adhamiyah, Iraq. Tom has since spent countless hours comforting and counseling the Soldiers who survived that attack. At ceremonies coinciding with a posthumous Medal of Honor presentation, this grieving father reached out to an audience that included President George W. Bush to foster support for GI education benefits, lending his impassioned voice to untold Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. As Tom puts it, "I do what I do in honor of my son."

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SGT Brittany Raine

Then-Specialist Brittany Raine often asks, “Who wants to build a house and help this family?” As a representative of Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS), SPC Raine organized recreational activities and rallied Soldiers to volunteer for organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Driven by her belief that a strong community makes a strong Army, SPC Raine led Soldiers in giving back to their communities. She explained, “I’m proud of my service in Iraq, but I’m really glad to be able to help out right here in my community.”

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SSG Matthew Schilling

Then-Sergeant Matthew Schilling and his patrol were on a reconnaissance operation when their platoon leader was wounded. Surrounded and outnumbered by insurgents, SGT Schilling directed his comrades to set up a perimeter and return fire until the rescue choppers arrived. When they did arrive, he evacuated the wounded and led the rest of his unit to safety. His exceptional act of leadership earned SGT Schilling not only one of our Nation's highest honors, the Silver Star, but also the title of "hero" from his platoon leader.

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Ms. Pearl Speer

Strength can come from compassion. Pearl Speer has been an Army wife for more than 39 years and a mother to two Army sons. When she first joined the Army Community, the focus was on the Soldier and the mission. Army Families had to fend largely for themselves. Speer recognized an area where she could help other Army Families. She became the Director of Fort Riley Army Community Services, often doing four different jobs as she worked to create programs to provide vital services to Families in need. Today, Soldiers at Fort Riley can focus more on their work, knowing that their Families are in good hands.

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CSM George G. Terry, Retired

As a member of the 28th Infantry Regiment, the Black Lions, during the Vietnam War, Command Sergeant Major George G. Terry selflessly served his Nation front and center. Twenty-five years later, he continues to do just that. Living right near post, CSM (Ret.) Terry attends all events on the installation, big and small. Demonstrating a mixture of humility and pride, he not only serves as a role model to today's Soldiers, but also acts as an inspiration to us all regarding the importance of Army history, tradition and, above all, values. Is it any wonder that CSM (Ret.) Terry continues his role as Honorary Sergeant Major of the Black Lions?

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Samantha Mellinger and Laura Wernlein

Samantha Mellinger and Laura Wernlein love sharing with other kids – even those they’ll probably never meet, halfway around the world. These two Girl Scouts heard about American Soldiers helping to build youth soccer leagues in Iraq. Moved by reports of children playing on dirt and in bare feet, Samantha and Laura launched their own campaign to collect sports equipment for the Soldiers to distribute. Iraqi girls cannot participate in the soccer leagues, therefore Samantha and Laura are rounding up donations of dolls, coloring books and crayons, so no one is overlooked. Emblematic of American generosity and spirit, Samantha and Laura have contributed to the quiet diplomacy that is integral to every Soldier’s mission in Iraq.

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CPT David Johnston

Though he has never been under direct fire, Captain (Chaplain) David Johnston has saved countless lives and Families. Realizing that his calling was to enter the Army, and serve as a minister, CPT Johnston has positively impacted the lives of many Soldiers and Families as they cope with the pressures and heartaches of deployments and struggles at home. “I am called to take care of Soldiers. To laugh with them, to cry with them and help them put the broken pieces back together again,” he says. Whether through injuries or long deployments, CPT Johnston provides strength to Soldiers and Families.

The Nation’s strength starts here.





CW2 Melvin Nesteby, Retired

When the Japanese invaded Bataan in 1941, then-Private First Class Melvin Nesteby had been in the Army for less than six months. After surviving 155 days of fighting and the Bataan Death March, PFC Nesteby was captured and taken as a POW. He endured four POW camps until his release in 1945. Despite these experiences, PFC Nesteby later fought in the Korean War and eventually retired as a Chief Warrant Officer in 1961. CW2 Nesteby, who recently passed on, lived into his 80s, remained as steadfast as ever, declaring “I’ll stand to the last man in the cause for free people. I’ll stand to the last man.”

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SSG Robert Chase

Staff Sergeant Robert Chase returned from the Horn of Africa to find himself facing challenges virtually equal to those he found during his deployment. He was suddenly single and raising his then 6-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter alone. Taking advantage of Army resources for parenting and child care through the New Parent Support Program, SSG Chase now wakes each day to press for victory on two fronts – at home, where he readies his children for their days in school and childcare; and on the job, honing the strength of America’s fighting force. A rampart of parental love and security, this Soldier is strong enough, he jokes, to learn to paint toenails with his little girl.

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Ms. Syl Wyles

Syl Wyles, an Army spouse for more than 24 years and the mother of two boys, knows the importance of a strong Army Family. Though her children are grown, she is committed to ensuring the comfort and security of other Army spouses and children. More than eight years ago, she developed a scavenger hunt to not only help Soldiers and their Families acclimate to life on post, but to collect food for the Army food bank. The recipient of more than 10 awards, including Fort Lewis Volunteer of the Year, Wyles approaches volunteering with determination, strength and heart. She is an inspiration to Soldiers, their Families and other volunteers.

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David Smith

On the bleak day in 2003 when David Smith learned of his father's death, he told his mother that his dad must have lost his life to save other Soldiers. Months later, as David received from President George W. Bush Sergeant First Class Paul Ray Smith's Medal of Honor, his instincts were proven right. The presentation of the award for valor honored his father's extraordinary acts of heroism that spared the lives of numerous wounded Soldiers and was the first presented for service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. David continues to honor his father's memory by reaching out to console other children who have lost their parents to war. Now a member of his high school's JROTC unit, David is making plans to join the Army and echo his father's legacy of service to others.

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SGT Xiovani Guanill

Sergeant Xiovani Guanill's company commander says SGT Guanill is always looking for ways to improve himself as a Soldier and a leader. His record proves it: NCO of the Year Board, Brigade NCO of the Year, and runner-up at the Army Special Operations Command NCO of the Year Board. For SGT Guanill, it's all about one thing. He wants the deployed Soldier he's replacing to go home knowing that the person following is the best Soldier he or she can be.

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SSG Monica St. Hill

Staff Sergeant Monica St. Hill joined the Army for freedom – freedom from spousal abuse. She asked to be assigned to the military police as a way of reaching and protecting other victims of abuse. “I know the freedom that joining the military brought me, and I, in turn, like seeing other people free.” While at Camp Shelby, Miss., preparing to deploy to Iraq, she fractured her ankle. During her treatment, SSG St. Hill discovered she had Type II diabetes. Her injury and illness brought her to the Eisenhower Army Medical Center’s Warriors Transition Battalion. SSG St. Hill was able to beat her diabetes, and her time in the WTB inspired her to return to active duty as a member of the cadre in the same WTB where she recovered.

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SFC Brandon Zylstra

Sergeant First Class Brandon Zylstra says he was just doing his job “to go out and fight the enemy.” On a 2007 mission to re-supply another company with water and ammunition, SFC Zylstra’s unit found itself in the wrong neighborhood – trapped with a jack-knifed supply trailer as enemy fire rained from the tops of nearby buildings. SFC Zylstra, defied the firestorm that followed to drag one, and then another wounded Soldier to safety, returning even after his men were safe to retrieve a dropped weapon. Such valor under fire earned SFC Zylstra the Silver Star. He calls it acting “on instinct.” A fellow Soldier says it’s more like SFC Zylstra “epitomizes the Strength of the Nation.”

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CSM Ed Foerstel, Retired

When Command Sergeant Major Ed Foerstel retired from the Army, he didn't lose his commitment to selfless service. His good friend and fishing buddy, Greg Harvey, needed a kidney transplant, and CSM (Ret.) Foerstel stood up to answer the call. After being tested and deemed a match, CSM (Ret.) Foerstel underwent surgery to donate his kidney to Harvey in February 2007. That is the true definition of a battle buddy, Harvey says. Standing by your friends and family and supporting each other through personal sacrifice ... that is overall Army strength.

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SFC Randy Shorter

Leading by example has always been the way of Sergeant First Class Randy Shorter, and his actions on July 30, 2008 were no different. SFC Shorter's four-vehicle convoy was ambushed by more than 30 insurgents using rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns. The first vehicle struck an improvised explosive device, seriously injuring the men inside. SFC Shorter called for medical evacuation and then ran through enemy fire to aid Soldiers in the damaged vehicle. He heroically carried one Soldier to safety. For this courageous action, SFC Shorter received the Silver Star.

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MSG Scott Ford and SSG John Walding

On the morning of April 6, 2008, Master Sergeant Scott Ford, Staff Sergeant John Walding and an assault team of Green Berets landed at the base of the fortress-like Shok Valley village in Afghanistan. They were expecting to face 15 to 20 enemies, but what they encountered was a fierce ambush by hundreds of Taliban fighters. The team called in an astounding 70 danger-close airstrikes during the 6.5 hour battle. MSG Ford and SSG Walding, though wounded themselves, refused to accept defeat and earned Silver Stars for their sheer will, initiative and heroism.

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Ms. Colleen Saffron

Colleen Saffron, an Army spouse, found her calling by empowering other military spouses and caregivers, while also empowering herself. In 2004, her husband – Staff Sergeant Terry Saffron Jr. – was injured in an improvised explosive device attack in Iraq and the Family needed a second income. Saffron found few job training and career resources for caregivers online, so she, along with two other military spouses, created Operation Life Transformed. The program helps educate and employ hundreds of military spouses and caregivers.

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SSG Joshua Forbess

Staff Sergeant Joshua Forbess was flying over Mosul, Iraq, in a Black Hawk in November 2003, when it collided mid-air with another helicopter. SSG Forbess, the only survivor from his unit, suffered severe burns over his face and upper body, and was in a coma for months. Battered, but not beaten, SSG Forbess requested a return to active duty and dedicated himself to working with Wounded Warriors and other Veterans. He truly embodies the Strength of the Nation.

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SSG Robbie Robbins, Retired

Retired Staff Sergeant Lowell “Robbie” Robbins takes his military commitment beyond retirement for the Soldiers and Families at Fort Sill, Okla. Robbins is known for bringing Thanksgiving dinners to Army Families, or signing up volunteer drivers for the hospital’s Operation Wheels program. SSG (Ret.) Robbins, a member of the Vietnam Veterans Chapter 751, says his motto is “never leave another generation of Soldiers behind.” He lives that motto daily by ensuring today’s Soldiers have the support they deserve.

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SSG Eduardo Guitron

Staff Sergeant Eduardo Guitron describes himself as an “indomitable Soldier.” He is as physically strong as he is mentally strong, but he wasn’t always that way. Three deployments left him with doubt and cynicism. A 2009 stint at the Army’s Master Resilience Trainer course, part of the Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, changed that. Not only did SSG Guitron become the Soldier he once was, he became a mentor at the MRT course. Today, he helps other Soldiers acquire the skills they need to better face the stress and challenges of sustained operations. The recipient of numerous awards, badges and Tabs, such as the Combat Infantry Badge and Ranger Tab, for his work, SSG Guitron is determined to help his fellow Soldiers be resilient and indomitable.

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Ms. Tanisha Owens

Pride in her family and in her husband’s service keeps Tanisha Owens going despite the Army life that more often than not keeps her husband from home. While enduring Chief Warrant Officer I Antonio Owens’ 14-hour workdays on base, and his multiple tours of duty in Iraq, Owens has valiantly raised the couple’s three children – even suffering the loss of a stillborn infant. She also has instilled in her children a pride so fierce, the 2-year-old smiles whenever anyone mentions that his dad is in Iraq. Tanisha says she’s proud of her Family and proud to take care of things at home so her husband can take care of their country. “I love the Army,” she says. “Hooah.”

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Ms. Lynn Bragg

Lynn Bragg knows that a strong Army spouse supports a strong Army Soldier, and she does just that for her husband, Sergeant Major Merle Bragg. But being a strong Army spouse doesn't end there for Bragg. As the lead volunteer for her local Family Readiness Program, Bragg spends her weekends volunteering at the armory. She is also the local coordinator for Operation Homefront, which donates toys at Christmas and school supplies in the fall. As a regular volunteer for the Wounded Warrior Program, she helps sponsor trips to the beach for Veterans and their Families. She was instrumental in establishing the first endowed scholarship of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and she opens her home and personal resources to struggling spouses of deployed Soldiers. Lynn explains all of this with, "I just help people."

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SFC Jarrett Jongema

In 2004, while deployed in Iraq, Sergeant First Class Jarrett Jongema suffered serious, life-threatening injuries that nearly cost him his life. Fellow Unit member Sergeant Major Scott Wilmont recalls, "He had to be resuscitated four times. He just wouldn't give up." And he still hasn't. After a long and arduous rehabilitation, SFC Jongema accepted a position as an Assignment Manager at Human Resources Command where he helps new Soldiers find the best fit for their service. His love for the Army and his commitment to making each Soldier's experience the best that it can be is helping the Soldiers and keeping the Army strong. SFC Jongema is also an ardent supporter of, and public speaker for, the Wounded Warrior Program. Where does he find the strength to keep going? "I do what I do because I believe in our Army and in our Soldiers."

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LTC James Graham, Retired

When Lieutenant Colonel Rick Graham found an Afghan child in need of medical care, he knew who to call on for help – his father, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) James Graham, a 28-year member of the Army National Guard. “If anyone was going to know how to help this child, I figured it was him.” LTC (Ret.) Graham and his wife, Roberta, immediately raised the funds to bring the child, Quadrat, and his father, Hakim, to the United States for the heart surgery the boy needed. When Quadrat passed away after his return to Afghanistan, LTC (Ret.) Graham and Roberta raised \$13,000 to help Hakim build a clinic and school in his village in Quadrat’s honor and name. The school and the clinic continue to grow today with LTC (Ret.) Graham’s assistance.

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MAJ (Dr.) John Oh

Major (Dr.) John Oh knew the patient coming into the hospital in Afghanistan had a serious wound from a rocket-propelled grenade. What he didn't know was that the two-foot rocket was still lodged in the patient's body and was carrying a live charge. Despite imminent danger of explosion, MAJ Oh cleared the aid station and went into the operating room with a minimal crew of volunteers to perform the tense surgery. Because of MAJ Oh's extraordinary courage and selflessness, the rocket was successfully removed and the patient – Specialist Channing Moss – returned safely to his wife and daughters.

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Ms. Lorraine Melgosa

Lorraine Melgosa has found her life's calling. To the Families of a number of fallen Soldiers, she's provided the military services their loved ones so deserved. It all started when a hometown Soldier, Staff Sergeant Justin Vasquez was killed in action. Melgosa wanted to honor the local hero. So, she and her brother provided a unique circa 1900's horse-drawn carriage they owned to carry SSG Vasquez to his final resting place. And then they did it for another Soldier. And then another. As of today, Melgosa has provided that honor for military funerals throughout the Southwest and even as far north as Michigan – all at her own expense. As one mother appreciatively said, "I knew this was the right way for my son to go." Just one small way for her to show her appreciation.

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LTC Judith Jackson, Retired

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Judith Jackson is an Army spouse, a nurse and long-time supporter of active duty Soldiers. After college, LTC (Ret.) Jackson volunteered as a Donut Dolly and was deployed during the Vietnam War. While there she provided social and moral support, raising Soldiers' spirits when they needed it most. At age 52, she volunteered a second time to deploy to a combat response hospital, hoping young nurses would learn from her experience. According to one nurse, LTC (Ret.) Jackson's lessons were conveyed. "She's been in three wars - Vietnam, Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom. She's great with teaching young nurses and Soldiers how to cope." LTC (Ret.) Jackson carries on that tradition today at the Madigan Army Medical Center, continuing to bring strength to others.

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SSG David Beck

A leader. A mentor. An example to other Soldiers. Staff Sergeant David Beck is a true NCO. The recipient of five Purple Hearts, his sense of leadership was best epitomized when, during a 2009 combat mission, he took a bullet to the head. As described on his commendation, “SSG Beck continued to lead his squad in battle, effectively suppressing the enemy and allowing all troops on the patrol to return to the Command Observation Post uninjured.” One fellow Soldier says that it’s in SSG Beck’s nature to put his men above himself. For SSG Beck, it comes down to one sentence, “I am a Leader of Soldiers, an NCO.”

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SGT Aaron Manis

Sergeant Aaron Manis was a Bradley gunner on patrol in Iraq when an insurgent sniper changed his life. After multiple surgeries, months of recovery and the loss of his right eye, SGT Manis asked to be returned to active duty. He was right-handed, but he was determined to re-learn to shoot – with his other eye – and he did. Today, he serves in the 101st Airborne Division, ready to deploy and answer the call of his Nation again.

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Honorable Charles Romani

Chief Criminal Circuit Judge of Madison County in Illinois, the Honorable Charles Romani understands the toll the stress of war takes on a Soldier. As a Vietnam veteran, Romani saw his share of combat, and experienced the difficulty of deployment and the return to civilian life. After returning home from war, Romani received his law degree. These days, Hon. Romani serves as a circuit judge and presides over the newly-founded Madison County Veteran's Court. He ensures the right services are provided to best help rehabilitate these Soldiers. Veterans who complete their sentence appear for review at the end of their treatment or program, and the charges are dropped. Through his veteran's court, Hon. Romani can direct at-risk Soldiers to the help they need to keep their lives on the right track to make them better warrior citizens.

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SSG Salvatore Giunta

Staff Sergeant Giunta serves in the United States Army, Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry Regiment. On Oct. 25, 2007 he was serving in Afghanistan as a rifle team leader when he engaged the enemy to recover a wounded Soldier they were trying to take prisoner. After throwing hand grenades, SSG Giunta moved forward without hesitation into enemy fire to rescue his wounded comrade and assisted in keeping him alive before the Soldier eventually succumbed to his wounds. SSG Giunta's unwavering courage, in the midst of an ambush in which two American paratroopers gave their lives and several more were wounded, embodies the highest ideals of the Army Values. His selflessness and leadership above and beyond the call of duty exemplify the strength of the Nation. It is for this event that SSG Giunta received the Medal of Honor from the President during a White House ceremony November 17, 2010.

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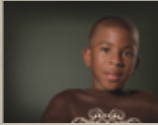
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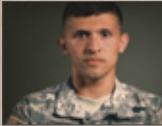
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